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THE LATEST TRAVEL GUIDE TO INSPIRE YOUR NEXT TRIP

Best Road Trip Stops From Salt Lake City to Yellowstone National Park

There's something undeniably enchanting about a road trip through the American West. The rugged landscapes, charming small towns, and the promise of adventure make it an experience like no other.

One of the best road trips you can take is from Salt Lake City to Yellowstone National Park.

This road trip takes about 5 or 6 hours, depending on which route you take. There is so much to see along the way, that it is well worth the drive!

There are two road trip options, you can either drive up through Wyoming, or through Idaho. If you are planning to make it a roundtrip, I would recommend driving up one way and home the other.

Keep reading to discover the best road trip stops from Salt Lake City to Yellowstone going through both Wyoming and Idaho.

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Salt Lake City to Yellowstone: Wyoming Route

The drive from Salt Lake City to Yellowstone takes a little less than 6 hours if you take the route through Wyoming.

Although this is the longer route, it is more scenic. Here are the stops you will not want to miss along the way!

EVANSTON, WYOMING

Evanston is a historic railroad town tucked into the beautiful Bear River Valley.

The Union Pacific Railroad was the first transcontinental railroad in the US and Evanston was founded in 1868 along the eastern route through the Wyoming Territory.

In fact, you can still see the old rail tracks crisscrossing the town.

Today, the main street is lined with historic buildings dating back to the late 1800s and it is the epitome of small-town charm.

Evanston is the perfect place to stop and grab a bite to eat on your road trip, and The Pie Hole is our favorite place to eat in town.

This family-run business makes its sweet and savory pies fresh from scratch daily. It will be hard to pick just one, but the classic banana cream pie and chicken pot pie were our favorites.

Other dining options include Main Street Deli. This cute deli is on Evanston's Main Street and offers a variety of sandwiches and salads.

Cafe Galleria is a cozy spot known for its delicious coffee and breakfast options.

Jody's Diner is a local favorite that serves up classic American comfort food, including burgers, shakes, and hearty breakfasts.

If you have more time to spend in Evanston, here are a few more recommended things to do.

Best things to do in Evanston Wyoming:

- **Wyoming Downs:** [Wyoming Downs](#) is a historic horse racing track located just west of Evanston. Racing season is typically from late spring to early fall, check the link for a schedule of the live horse racing events.
- **Chinese Joss House Museum:** Evanston has a unique Chinese history dating back to the late 1800s when Chinese immigrants played a significant role in the development of the railroad. Stop by the Chinese Joss House Museum to see interesting artifacts and learn more about the history.
- **Walking Tour:** Take a [self-guided walking tour](#) to see notable historic buildings and learn more about the town's early beginnings.
- **Hiking:** Evanston is a gateway to the stunning Uinta Mountains, which offer exceptional opportunities for hiking, fishing, and outdoor recreation. The Bear River State Park Loop Trail is popular for hiking and [Lily Lake from Mill Creek Road](#) is great for ATVs, cross-country skiing, mountain biking, and hiking.
- **Uinta County Museum:** Explore the town's history at the Uinta County Museum, where you can find fascinating exhibits on local culture, the railroad, and early pioneers.

BEAR LAKE, UTAH

If you have time, take about a 15-minute detour to Laketown on the south shore of Bear Lake. This massive lake is often called the "Caribbean of the Rockies" due to its stunning turquoise waters.

Here, you can rent paddleboards at Rendezvous Beach Rentals, or get a famous Bear Lake raspberry shake from Dee's Car Wash and Ice Cream Shop.

COKEVILLE, WYOMING

This route will take you right through Cokeville. This isn't your typical tourist destination due to its somber past.

In 1986, students at the Cokeville Elementary School were held hostage by David and Doris Young who were armed with guns and a bomb.

Miraculously, the only fatalities that occurred that day were David and Doris after Doris accidentally detonated the bomb.

Click the link to read more about the [Cokeville bombing](#).

As you're driving through Cokeville, you can drive by the elementary school and turn your thoughts to the children who survived the horrific event.

JACKSON, WYOMING

Continue on your way up to Jackson, Wyoming where I would recommend spending the night.

Jackson is often referred to as "Jackson Hole". However, Jackson Hole is the entire 60-mile valley, and Jackson is a small town nestled in the southern end of the valley.

The town was named after trapper David Edward Jackson in the early 19th century. It evolved from a remote trading post into a bustling hub for fur traders, cowboys, and adventurers.

Today, Jackson is a darling resort town in the shadow of the Teton Mountain Range where you can experience the rustic charm of the Wild West with a touch of modern flair.

I would recommend spending the night at [The Virginian Lodge](#) which is located less than a mile from downtown Jackson.

This iconic lodge was built in 1965 and has since been tastefully renovated into a retro-inspired boutique hotel.

The amenities include an on-site saloon with live music, a heated pool and hot tub, and cozy firepits with complimentary s'mores kits.

After getting settled into your hotel, head out and explore the town of Jackson.

Jackson's history is still evident today in the preserved wooden storefronts that line the Town Square.

Be sure to stop at the George Washington Memorial Park in the center of Town Square to see the famous arches made out of elk antlers that can be found at each corner of the park.

Stop in one of the many shops to pick up some souvenirs or western wear.

Kemo Sabe is the best place to go for an authentic cowboy hat or a custom pair of boots.

You can even watch as they steam and shape the brim of each hat.

There are also plenty of dining options in Jackson. We ate at Merry Piglets, a Tex-Mex restaurant with delicious tacos and fried ice cream.

Jackson Drug is a soda fountain that has been around since 1937 and serves old-fashioned malts and burgers.

Big Hole BBQ has some of the best brisket in town and the Million Dollar Cowboy Club is a lively bar with delicious food, drinks, and live music.

The Kitchen offers a farm-to-table experience that focuses on seasonal and locally sourced ingredients.

Hand Fire Pizza is housed inside the old historic Teton Theater and serves the best wood-fired pizza in Jackson.

For breakfast the next day, stop by The Bunnery for their French Toast made from homemade bread, or the Three-Egg Bacon Omelette.

Persephone Bakery is also a great option if you're looking for something quick before heading out on the road. Try the Croissant Sandwich or any of their freshly baked pastries.

If you have more time to spend in Jackson, here are a few more recommendations.

Best things to do in Jackson, Wyoming:

- **Granite Hot Springs:** These scenic hot springs are found near Granite Falls about an hour south of Jackson down an 11-mile dirt road.
- **Jackson Hole Rodeo:** This iconic rodeo is held on Wednesday and Saturday evenings during the summer months.
- **Snow King Mountain:** Check out the summer activities at Snow King Mountain, including the Cowboy Mountain Coaster, alpine slides, zip lines, and more.
- **Bar T 5:** Take a memorable covered wagon ride to a chuckwagon dinner at [Bar T 5](#).
- **Jackson Hole Playhouse:** Enjoy dinner and a show at this historic playhouse.
- **Astoria Hot Springs:** Enjoy soaking in the thermal pools at [Astoria Hot Springs](#). There is also a [natural hot spring](#) located on the edge of the Snake River that can be accessed when the water level is low in the fall and winter.
- **Jackson Hole Aerial Tram:** In the summer, take the Jackson Hole Aerial Tram to the top of the mountain for incredible views of Jackson Hole Valley and the Grand Tetons. Enjoy some delicious waffles at Corbet's Cabin located at the top of the mountain.
- **Via Ferrata:** For an unforgettable adventure, try the [Via Ferrata](#) where you'll climb along the face of sheer granite cliffs and cross suspension bridges high above the valley.
- **Jackson Hole Mountain Resort:** In the winter, Jackson Hole Mountain Resort is renowned for its world-class skiing.
- **Snake River Rafting:** For an adrenaline rush, book a [whitewater rafting adventure](#) down the Snake River. This tour is even family-friendly!

GRAND TETON NATIONAL PARK

I would recommend getting an early start the next morning. You'll likely be rewarded with an early morning mist and you'll have a greater chance of spotting wildlife.

The next stop on your road trip will be at Grand Teton National Park just north of Jackson. It lives up to its name as it is grand indeed! It offers awe-inspiring vistas, pristine lakes, and abundant wildlife.

Your road trip will take you along Highway 89 where you can take a short detour to [Menor's Ferry Historic District](#).

This area provides a glimpse into the park's early homesteading and pioneer history.

Don't miss the Menor's Ferry General Store, Bill Menor's cabin, a replica of the ferry used to cross the Snake River, and the nearby Chapel of the Transfiguration.

The window above the church's altar has a perfect view of the tallest peaks in the Teton Mountain Range.

Mormon Row can also be reached by a short detour off the highway. Here you can find what remains of an early 1890s settlement.

The Moulton Barns can be found here and are one of the most photographed historic sites in Grand Teton National Park.

The John Moulton Barn and T.A. Moulton Barn were built in the early 1900s and have withstood the test of time.

What makes these barns particularly photogenic is the majestic Tetons that serve as a backdrop.

There were once 27 homesteads in this area, but now the Chambers homestead complex is all that remains.

As you continue along Highway 89, you'll be treated to some incredible views of the Tetons.

There are several scenic pull-outs where you can snap a photo and read the informational signs.

The drive is particularly scenic starting at Oxbow Bend.

The road continues to hug along the shore of Jackson Lake where you'll get incredible views of the Tetons mirrored in the water.

If you have more time to spend at Grand Teton National Park, consider taking the 15-minute boat ride across Jenny Lake to Cascade Canyon.

Once you reach the other side of the lake, you can hike the 1.8-mile trail to Inspiration Point. Be sure to take the short detour from the trail to see Hidden Falls as well.

YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK

The final destination of your road trip is Yellowstone National Park. This route will take you to the south entrance of the park.

We have put together a separate guide that maps out the best things to see in Yellowstone starting from the south entrance and making your way north.

See our guide [10 Things to Do in Yellowstone](#) for all of the details and information.

I would also recommend spending a few days exploring the park.

Accommodations are limited inside the park, but there are several campgrounds. You can also book a room at the historic [Old Faithful Inn](#) or [Mammoth Hot Springs Hotel](#).

For a unique experience, consider booking a stay at the [O.T.O Dude Ranch](#) just north of Yellowstone.

This all-inclusive ranch includes all meals, trail rides, and activities. It is the perfect way to embrace the spirit of the West!

Salt Lake City to Yellowstone: Idaho Route

The route to Yellowstone through Idaho is about an hour shorter than the Wyoming route.

In my opinion, it's not quite as scenic as you'll mostly be passing by miles of farmland. However, there are a few places that are worth stopping along the way.

SALT LAKE CITY

If you have time before you head out of Salt Lake City, the [Pink Lake](#) at Stansbury Island is a cool hidden gem just west of the city.

The famed Bonneville Salt Flats are a little further west of Stansbury Island as well.

You could also take a detour to Antelope Island to see the resident herd of bison and explore one of the many hiking trails.

A few more things to do in Salt Lake City include taking a tour of Temple Square and learning about the pioneer history at This Is The Place Heritage Park.

LAVA HOT SPRINGS

Your first stop along your road trip to Yellowstone will be at Lava Hot Springs.

I would actually recommend spending the night at Lava Hot Springs because there is so much to do in the area.

We stayed at the [Harkness Hotel](#) just outside of Lava Hot Springs and fell in love with this darling boutique hotel.

It is housed inside the old McCammon State Bank building that was built in 1906. The original bank vault is even used as the lobby gift shop!

The building has been lovingly restored with modern touches while still retaining its historic charm.

After checking into your hotel, you'll want to spend a full day at Lava Hot Springs. This cute town boasts a variety of hot springs and swimming pools.

The hot springs are fed by a natural underground thermal spring. There are 5 different hot springs to soak in with temperatures varying from 102° F to 112° F degrees.

The Sunken Gardens hot springs are especially beautiful and can be found at the bottom of a terraced garden.

There is also an outdoor Olympic-sized swimming pool with water slides, as well as an indoor aquatic center.

Visitors can purchase an [all-day pass](#) that allows access to the different pools and hot springs throughout the day.

Another popular thing to do in Lava Hot Springs is tubing down the Portneuf River.

It's refreshing and thrilling as you encounter several rapids along the way.

There are quite a few tube rental companies in town, but [Portneuf Rapids](#) has great rates and is in a good location.

If you're looking for a bite to eat, Lava Waffle is open daily from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. and offers mouthwatering waffle creations.

Try the Cinn-A-Ful Lava with cream cheese frosting and a cinnamon glaze, or the Sunshine & Summer with lemon curd, raspberries, and cream.

We also ate at the Royal Hotel and Pizzeria.

It is located inside a historic 1914 hotel with a fun atmosphere, but the food was mediocre and overpriced.

IDAHO POTATO MUSEUM

No visit to Idaho Falls would be complete without paying homage to the state's most famous export—the potato.

The Idaho Potato Museum is a quirky roadside stop located in Blackfoot, Idaho and it truly embraces the Idaho spirit.

The museum is housed in the old Oregon Short Line Railroad Depot that was built in 1912. You'll also find a gift shop and cafe inside the building.

The small museum has exhibits and a short movie where you'll learn more than you probably ever cared to know about potatoes.

The gift shop has all sorts of potato-themed novelty gifts and souvenirs.

You'll get a kick out of just how many things are made out of potatoes, including candy and pancake mix!

You can even get a picture next to Marilyn Monroe when she infamously wore an Idaho potato sack as a dress.

Be sure to come with an appetite because you will definitely want to stop at the Potato Station Cafe and order a genuine Idaho baked potato.

They are also known for their fresh-cut fries, tater tots, tater dollars, and potato soup. If you're feeling adventurous, you can even try a potato cupcake!

IDAHO FALLS

Idaho Falls is a picturesque city crowning the bank of the Snake River.

If you don't have a lot of time as you are passing through on your road trip, you'll at least want to stop and stretch your legs with a stroll along the River Walk.

The path follows along the Snake River where you'll see a series of man-made waterfalls that Idaho Falls is known for.

It also passes by the well-maintained Greenbelt Park that lines the river. This is the perfect spot for a picnic if you want to grab some take-out to enjoy by the river.

You'll also want to stop at the Japanese Friendship Garden where you can experience a touch of Japan in Idaho Falls. You'll find a beautifully landscaped area complete with koi ponds and colorful blooms.

If you're feeling more adventurous, rent a [jet ski or kayak](#) and explore the river from a different perspective. It's not very often that you can drive a jet ski down a river in the middle of a city!

The Idaho Falls Zoo at Tautphaus Park is also a popular place to go, especially if you have kids.

ISLAND PARK

Island Park is a great road trip stop for outdoor enthusiasts. Hike the 4-mile Box Canyon Trail, get some fresh air at Harriman State Park, and let the kids cool off with a dip in Henry's Lake.

If you have time, take the hour-long drive along the Mesa Falls Scenic Byway. Along the way, you'll pass by the Upper Mesa Falls and Lower Mesa Falls observation sites.

The Upper Mesa Falls is the most impressive where you'll find a 114-foot-tall waterfall

plummeting over a volcanic cliff.

Big Springs is also worth a stop. This is one of the largest springs in the country and you can see massive rainbow trout swimming in the crystal clear water.

If you're lucky, you may even spot a moose getting a refreshing drink in the river!

You can also take a walk along the Big Springs Nature Trail and stop by to see the nearby historic Johnny Sack Cabin.

If you choose not to spend the night at Lava Hot Springs, Island Park has a lot of cabins available to rent and it is only about a half hour from West Yellowstone.

[Wander Camp](#) is also a unique place to stay in Island Park and offers glamping tents under the stars.

We stayed at Wander Camp outside of the [Grand Canyon](#) and had a great experience.

WEST YELLOWSTONE

This route will take you to the town of West Yellowstone located at the west entrance of Yellowstone National Park.

In 1908, a train line ran from Salt Lake City to Yellowstone which started a tourist boom in West Yellowstone.

Today, it is still considered the gateway to Yellowstone National Park and many of the historic buildings are still standing.

It's a great place to grab a bite to eat, shop for souvenirs, watch an IMAX movie about Yellowstone, or see wild animals at the Grizzly & Wolf Discovery Center.

I hope this guide will help you discover the best road trip stops from Salt Lake City to Yellowstone National Park!